

Dear Azadeh Moaveni,

My name is Yasamin Oloomi, and I am a junior at South Side High School in Fort Wayne. Like you, I am an Iranian-American. My father lived the first eighteen years of his life in Iran and moved to America to go to college and to find a job. As a young child, I was never familiar with many Iranian customs nor did I know Farsi, the national language of Iran. When I was six years old, my family spent three months in Iran. Because I was so young, many of the cultural differences, such as women wearing scarves, made no sense to me, and I never had much appreciation for my heritage.

After reading your novel, Lipstick Jihad, I was excited, because I had finally learned about someone who encountered many of the same experiences that I had. For example, in the beginning of the novel, you mentioned that, as a young girl, you were ashamed of your heritage, and you referred to yourself as "Persian" so that people would not know where you were from. In the same way, I often tell people that I am "Persian," because fewer questions arise.

Though I do not practice Islam, everyone on my dad's side of the family does. Because I am not Muslim, I know little about the Islamic beliefs and practices. However, after reading Lipstick Jihad, I learned a lot about Ramadan, which is the most important Islamic holiday, and the conservative Islamic culture.

My favorite part of the novel was when you wrote about how Iranians view cliché American phrases, such as "I love you, but I am not in love with you." I have always known that the Iranian culture is sincere; however, I did not know that cliché phrases, such as the one mentioned above, do not exist in Farsi. This helped me to realize that when I talk to my family members on my father's side, I should always say what I mean, and I should not beat around the bush.

In the past, when speaking to my dad, it was sometimes difficult. Because he grew up in Iran and I grew up in America, many of his interests differ from mine. However, after reading your novel, I was able to ask him questions about his country and his opinions on the government. For the first time, I knew enough about Iran to hold a conversation with him about the culture. Also, because throughout the book, you mentioned a few words in Farsi, I was able to ask him for "bastani" instead of ice cream and ask him about the "Basij" or police in Iran. Also, I realized that I wanted to be able to speak to my non-English-speaking relatives, so I began to learn Farsi.

Without a doubt, Lipstick Jihad had a lasting effect on the way that I view my heritage. Because of the novel, I know now how important it is to study my cultural background and to learn the customs of my people. Thank you so much for sharing your experience in Iran and helping America to understand the Iranian culture.

Sincerely,

Yasamin Oloomi